DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 596 EC 152 533

AUTHOR Welch, Frances C.
TITLE Research-Based Answers to Questions about Stress and Burnout.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of The Council for Exceptional Children (61st, Detroit, MI, April 4-8, 1983). Print is broken in parts.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disabilities; Principals; *Special Education Teachers; *Stress Variables; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Burnout

ABSTRACT

Surveys on teacher burnout and stress were sent to 27 randomly selected school districts in South Carolina categorized as rural, urban, or suburban. Nine districts were then randomly selected from each stratification category. After districts were selected, nine schools (three each elementary, middle, and high) were (again, randomly) selected, and 243 principals of these schools were contacted by letter. Each principal was asked to complete the survey and to request completion by one of the school's special educators and by one of its regular educators. Of the 729 surveys sent, 429 were returned. The survey included three sections: personal data, sources of stress in schools, and symptoms of stress. Analysis of results revealed, among other findings, that self-contained special education teachers averaged the greatest number of school days missed, and principals the fewest; notification of unsatisfactory performance, last week of school, overcrowded classrooms, and disruptive students were rated as high sources of stress; planning for instruction, attending meetings, conferring with parents and the principal, and evaluating students performance were rated as presenting relatively less stress; and symptoms of stress were found to be feelings of tiredness, emotional exhaustion, and anxiety. Sources and symptoms appeared to be consistent across positions and school levels. Findings suggested the need to identify sources of stress and use appropriate methods of management. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED235596

Research-based Answers to Questions about Stress and Burnout

Frances C. Welch

College of Charleston
Charleston, SC 29424

Paper presented at the 1983 International Council for Exceptional Children Convention, Detroit, Michigan, April 5, 1983.

EC152533

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Frances C Welch
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Teaching is a very stressful occupation. Special care should and must be given to techniques for handling the anxiety and stress associated with the occupation. What are the sources of stress and burnout for educators? What can educators do to prevent burnout and cope with the frustrations arising from teaching?

Burnout is a relatively new term being first used in print in 1974; however, the phenomena existed before 1974. It had other names like job satisfaction, teacher morale, or nervous breakdown (Cherniss, 1980). Burnout is a topic of current interest and many books (Cherniss, 1980, De Shong, 1979; Shaw, Bencky & Dixon, 1981; Spaniol & Caputo, 1979) articles (Bardo, 1979; Brown and Carlton, 1980; Hendrickson, 1979; Hunter, 1977; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977; Pratt, 1978; Scrivens, 1979; Sparks, 1979; Stevenson, 1975) and workshops (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1981; Burnout: A Survival Kit, 1979; Program Management Training, 1982; Stress and the Classroom Teacher, 1979) are available for persons who want information. Although there is an abundance of information available on burnout in popular magazines, newspapers and professional journals, relatively few research studies have been conducted (Landsmann, 1978; Morris, 1980, Pratt, 1978; Samples, 1976; Walsh, 1979).

Most writers (Cherniss, 1980; Gargiulo & Partin, 1980; Gray, 1979; Moe, 1979; Reed, 1979; Samples, 1976; Sylvester, 1977; Walsh, 1979) agree that burnout is easier to observe and describe than it is to define. Descriptions which are found in the literature (Cardinell, 1981; Chamberlain, 1981; Hunter, 1977; Jones & Emanuel, 1981, Kremer, 1979; Stevenson & Milt, 1975; Syles & Cavanaugh, 1977) include:

loss of energy and motivation

wearing yourself out doing what you have to do.

giving beyond your limits.

not being able to deal with the stress of your job.

physical, emotional and attitudinal exhaustion.

unchecked stress.

combat neurosis.

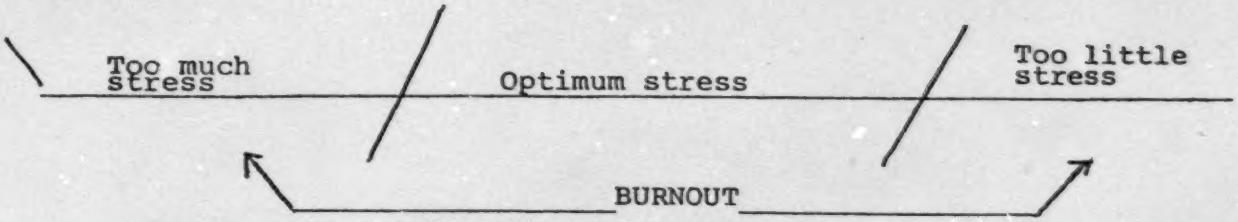
feeling locked into a routine.

when your candle goes out and you don't want a match.

when you literally or figuratively drop out.

Spaniol and Caputo (1979) define burnout as "the inability to cope adequately with the stress of our work or personal lives" (p. 2). Ricken (1980) says, "a condition of burnout exists when a person is attempting to perform a job by merely going through the motions" (p. 21). Shaw et al. (1981) give this defintion of burnout, "excessive exposure to ambiguous, inconsistent and/or uncontrollable school demands . . . occurs when individuals reach their adaptability limit and can no longer cope with the stressers" (p. 2). Cherniss says that burnout is the, "progressive loss of idealism, energy and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions as a result of the conditions of their work . . . and the conditions vary" (p. 24). The writers agree that burnout happens to people who work with other humans and occurs when helpers can no longer cope with the stress in their lives.

Without some stress, nobody would get anything accomplished; therefore, stress in and of itself is not the sole culprit. A diagram which presents the relationship between stress and burnout follows:



Burnout results when the individual is experiencing either too much or too little stress; the topic of most writings on burnout is too much stress or distress. A key word in the previous sentence describing the relationship between stress and burnout is "individual," because the optimum amount of stress, that which enables the individual to function most efficiently and effectively, varies from individual to individual. What may be too much stress for one individual may not be enough for another.

Many stressors or sources of stress have been described in the literature, but Hunter (1977) emphasizes that there is no universally stressful event because each person reacts to stress in a different way. Weiskopf (1980) writes that stressors are of three types and include the characteristics of (1) the individual (some people tend to be more stress-prone than others, i.e., Type A versus Type B personalities); (2) work-environment; and (3) extra-organizational factors such as family problems, life crises and financial difficulties.

As reported in the literature, the sources of stress vary. Stressors result in burnout when they interact and form a chronic, constant pattern in an individual's life. Since the sources vary with the individual, each educator must identify the potentially harmful sources of stress for him or herself, remembering that the identified stressors may

be personal or organizational.

Signs and symptoms of burnout appear when the stressors are unchecked. No one individual has all the signs and symptoms of burnout, and the symptoms and severity vary from individual to individual.

Because there is limited research on burnout and an especial dearth of investigative studies which compares sources and symptoms of burnout for regular and special educators and principals, the present study was designed to investigate stressors for these three groups of educators and the resulting symptoms. The design allows comparisons among the three groups as well as of categories within the groups, i.e., resource teachers versus self-contained special education teachers, elementary versus secondary educators, etc.

Method

A survey was designed which included three sections: personal data, sources of stress in schools and symptoms of stress. Twenty seven school districts were randomly selected from the Directory of South Carolina Schools (1980-81). Prior to random selection, the districts were categorized rural, urban or suburban based on information in Rankings, a 1981 S.C. State Department of Education publication. Nine districts were randomly selected from each stratification category.

After districts were selected, nine schools (three each elementary, middle and high) were randomly selected. The 243 principals of the selected schools were contacted by letter. Each principal was asked to complete the survey and request that two of his teachers, one special educator and one regular educator complete it. The surveys were designed so that each participant individually returned his or her survey by mail

to the investigator.

Of the 729 surveys that were sent to the principals, 429 (59%) were returned. The returned surveys were representative of all school levels and positions. As expected relatively few persons having advanced doctoral degrees are included in the study; yet, the number is representative of doctoral level personnel in South Carolina schools. Although schools and districts were selected with stratification guidelines to be representative of those in South Carolina, significantly more surveys were returned from schools in rural areas than in urban or suburban.

Results

Data were analyzed by obtaining descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, ranges, etc.) for each of the variables in the survey. Further analyses were completed by obtaining correlation coefficients (Spearman) between all variables in the survey.

In Table 1 the average number of school days missed and the range is presented. Comparing the mean number of missed days across positions, self-contained special education teachers missed the most days (5.69) and principals missed the fewest days (1.80). When the mean number of missed days is compared for the three school levels, only slight differences are noted but high school personnel missed the fewest days (3.42).

A summary of the highest and lowest mean ratings of the sources of stress is presented in Table 2. A perusal of Table 2 reveals that there is considerable consistency across positions of those factors which are sources of stress. Rated highest by all groups was the

Table 1

School Days Missed

	Mean	Range
Total Group	4.05	0-73
By Position		
Secondary teachers	4.85	0-20
Middle School teachers	5.11	0-35
Elementary teachers	5.07	0-19
Self-Contained special education	5.69	1-13
Resource	4.24	0-17
Principals	1.80	0-20
By School Level		
Elementary	4.32	0-20
Middle	4.48	0-73
High	3.42	0-20

Table 2

Sources of Stress - Mean Ratings By Position

Rated Highest	Total Group	Secondary Teachers	Middle School Teachers	Elementary Teachers
Other	6.00 (1)	6.46 (1)	6.07 (1)	6.0 (1)
Notification of unsatisfactory performance	4.99 (2)	5.09 (2)	5.26 (2)	5.43 (3)
Last week of school	4.85 (3)		4.65 (4)	5.06 (5)
Overcrowded classrooms	4.53 (4)	4.88 (3)	5.08 (3)	5.63 (2)
Managing disruptive students	4.42 (5)	4.42 (5)	4.57 (5)	5.24 (4)
Threatened with personal injury		4.58 (4)		
Reorganization of classes				
Change in responsibilities				
First week of school				

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Sources of Stress – Mean Ratings By Position

Rated Highest	Self-contained special education	Resource	Principals
Other	5.50 (1)	6.0 (1)	6.05 (1)
Notification of unsatisfactory performance	5.09 (2)	4.85 (2)	4.96 (3)
Last week of school	4.42 (3)		5.24 (2)
Overcrowded classrooms		4.56 (3)	
Managing disruptive students	4.31 (4)	4.39 (4)	
Threatened with personal injury			
Reorganization of classes	3.92 (5)		4.08 (5)
Change in responsibilities		4.33 (5)	
First week of school			4.89 (4)

(continued)

category "other". The stressors stated in this category are too numerous and diverse to include. A second significantly high source of stress was notification of unsatisfactory performance. Other school factors consistently rated as important sources of stress were: last week of school, overcrowded classrooms and managing disruptive students.

Although those factors receiving the lowest mean ratings were not as consistent as those in the highest rated category, there was much consistency across positions. Those school factors which cause relatively less stress are planning for instruction, attending meetings, conferring with parents, evaluating student performance, and conferencing with the principal.

Table 3 is a summary of the mean ratings of symptoms of stress. As with sources of stress, the ratings were consistent. Three symptoms were consistently rated highest: tired, emotionally exhausted and anxious. Also three symptoms were consistently rated lowest: feeling worthless, rejected and hostile.

Table 4 is a listing of the mean totals for the symptoms of stress ratings. As reported in the literature, an individual should become concerned when this total exceeds 80.

Although correlation coefficients were computed for all factors in the survey, none of the coefficients were educationally significant. Some coefficients were statistically significant, however, these were between symptoms such as feeling tired and physical exhaustion. Significant correlations did not result between relevant factors such as days missed and particular sources of stress or symptoms of stress, nor between school location and sources or symptoms of stress.

Table 3

Symptoms of Stress - Mean Ratings By Position

Rated Highest	Total Group	Secondary Teachers	Middle School Teachers	Elementary Teachers
Tired	4.32 (1)	4.67 (1)	4.29 (1)	4.64 (1)
Emotionally exhausted	3.85 (2)	4.06 (2)	3.89 (2)	4.07 (2)
Anxious	3.80 (3)		3.59 (3)	4.02 (3)
Physically exhausted		3.98 (3)		
Bad day				
Rated Lowest				
Worthless	2.36 (1)	2.76 (3)	2.43 (3)	2.40 (2)
Rejected	2.43 (2)	2.63 (2)	2.41 (2)	2.37 (1)
Hostile	2.45 (3)	2.61 (1)	2.39 (1)	2.47 (3)
Trapped				
Hopeless				

(continued)

Table 4

Symptoms of Stress - Mean Total of All Factors

Group	Mean
Total Group	63.22
By Position	
Secondary teachers	68.45
Elementary teachers	65.13
Principals	63.28
Self-contained special education	62.63
Resource teachers	61.40
Middle school teachers	60.74
By School Level	
Elementary	62.18
Middle	62.79
Secondary	64.85

Discussion

Considering the consistency of the sources and symptoms of stress and burnout as described by special and regular educators and principals, intervention and prevention strategies should be implemented. Numerous strategies have been described (Brown & Carlton, 1980; Cherniss, 1980; De Shong, 1981; Shaw et al. 1981, Spaniol & Caputo, 1979; Stevenson & Milt, 1975; Weiskopf, 1980). The present writer has organized these strategies into six categories. A brief description of each category follows:

1) Awareness

The first step towards positively dealing with job stress is recognition that it exists and a desire to implement a prevention or intervention plan.

2) Time Management

Many educators experience burnout because they have too much to do and not enough time. Thus, it follows that educators can reduce stress by improving the management of their time.

3) Support System

Persons who are experiencing burnout tend to rely on support systems that are harmful such as drugs or food. Also, they tend to isolate or alienate themselves. It follows logically then that an effective stress reduction intervention plan includes having a person or persons as a support group.

4) Take Care of Yourself

One reason that teachers burnout is that they are so busy taking care of everyone else's needs (family, students, parents, administrators, etc.) that they don't take care of their own needs. The old

saying, "you must take care of yourself or nobody else will" is true. Teachers should engage in activities for themselves and not feel guilty about it.

5) Change

Because teachers who are burning out feel locked into a routine, one effective strategy is to do things differently.

6) Learn Something New

One particularly effective intervention is to learn new skills. These may be professional or personal growth classes.

According to the results of the current investigation, the sources and symptoms of stress appear to be consistent across positions and school levels. Because of this consistency, administrators could plan for alleviating or managing some of the sources of stress, i.e., last week of school, overcrowded classrooms, by implementing district or school stress prevention plans. Perhaps some responsibilities which are designated for the end of school could be implemented during another time and classes could be reorganized. Thus, an overall stress prevention plan for districts or schools should be considered.

Although there is consistency in the rated sources and symptoms of stress these results also support the need for individualization. For example, the highest rated source of stress was the category "other". The stressors reported under "other" were varied and depended on the individual. Had there been a category "other" for symptoms, perhaps it too would have received high ratings. Consequently, although districts and schools should implement overall prevention and intervention plans for dealing with stress and burnout, these overall

plans should include development and intervention of individual plans for persons who are at high risk, i.e., those with total scores of symptoms above 80. The completion and implementation of an Individualized Burnout Intervention Plan (IBIP) will enable educators to identify personal sources and symptoms of stress and assist in the management of stress by selecting and using appropriate strategies.

References

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Burnout Workshop, St. Louis, Missouri, 1981.

Bardo, P. The pain of teacher burnout: A case history. Phi Delta Kappan, December, 1979, 252-256.

Brown, G.R., & Carlton, P.W. How to conquer stress when you can and cope with it when you can't. The National Elementary Principal, 1980, 59 (3), 37-39.

Cardinell, C.F. Burnout? Mid-life crisis? Let's understand ourselves. Contemporary Education, 1981, 52 (2), 103-108.

Chamberlin, L.J. Burnout: A threat to teachers. School and Community, 1981, 67 (8), 14-16, 45.

Cherniss, C. Staff burnout: Job stress in the human services. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980.

De Shong, B.R. The special educator: Stress and survival. Rockville, Maryland: Aspen Corp., 1981.

Dixon, B., Shaw, S.F., & Bensky, J.M. Administrator's role in fostering the mental health of special services personnel. Exceptional Children, 1980, 47 (1), 30-36.

Gargiulo, R.M., & Partin, R.L. Burned out teachers have no class! Prescriptions for teacher educators. College Student Journal, 1980, 14 (4), 365-368.

Gray, L.J. Slow down: You move too fast. Teacher, 1979, 96 (8), 52-53.

Hendrickson, B. Teacher burnout: How to recognize it; what to do about it. Learning, 1979, 7 (5), 36-39.

Hunter, M. Counterirritants to teaching. Instructor, 1977, 87 (1), 122-125.

Jones, M. A., & Emanuel, J. There is life after burnout. The High School Journal, 1981, 64 (5), 209-212.

Kyriacou, C., & Sutcliffe, J. Teacher stress: A review. Educational Review, 1977, 29 (4), 299-306.

Landsmann, L. Warning to principals: You may be hazardous to your teachers' health. The National Elementary Principal, 1978, 57 (3), 69-72.

Moe, D. Teacher burnout: A prescription. Today's Education, 1979, 68 (4), 35-36.

Morris, J.E., Cnissom, B.S., Seaman,A., & Tooke, D.J. Student teacher morale: A comparison of morale among four groups of student teachers. College Student Journal, 1980, 14 (4), 347-355.

Needle, R.H., Griffin, T., Svendson, R., & Berney, C. Teacher stress: Sources and consequences. The Journal of School Health, 1980, 50 (2), 96-99.

Pratt, J. Perceived stress among teachers: The effects of age and background of children taught. Educational Review, 1978, 30 (1), 3-14.

Rankings of the Counties and School Districts of South Carolina, 1979-80. Columbia, South Carolina: South Carolina Department of Education, 1981.

Reed, S. What you can do to prevent teacher burnout. The National Elementary Principal, 1979, 58 (3), 67-70.

Ricken, R. Teacher burnout - A failure of the supervisory process. NASSP Bulletin, 1980, 64 (434), 21-24.

Samples, B. Sanity in the schoolroom. The Science Teacher, 1976, 43 (7), 24-27.

South Carolina Department of Education. 1981-82 Directory of South Carolina Schools. Columbia, South Carolina: 1981.

Scrivens, R. The big click. Today's Education. November-December, 1979, 34-35.

Shaw, S.F. Bensky, J.M., & Dixon, B. Stress and burnout: A primer for special education and special services personnel. Reston, Virginia: The Council for Exceptional Children, 1981.

Spaniol, L., & Caputo, J. Professional Burnout: A personal survival kit. Lexington, Massachusetts: Human Services Associates, 1979.

Sparks, D. Teacher burnout: A teacher center tackles the issue. Today's Education, 1979, 68 (4), 37-39.

Stevenson, G.S., & Milt, H. Ten tips to reduce teacher tension. Today's Education, 1975, 64 (2), 52-54.

Syles, K., & Cavanagh, G. Stress in teaching and how to handle it. English Journal, 1977, 66 (1), 76-79.

Sylvester, R. Stress. Instructor, 1977, 86 (7), 72-74, 76.

The Grantsmanship Center. Stop burnout. A Program Mangement Training Brochure, 1982.

Walsh, D. Classroom stress and teacher burnout. Phi Delta Kappan, 1979, 61 (4), 253.

Weiskopf, P.E. Burnout among teachers of exceptional children. Exceptional Children, 1980, 47 (1), 18-23.